

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 2, 2017

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke:

As you know, farmers and ranchers are the best conservationists this nation has to offer. They work to maintain the natural integrity of both private and federally owned lands. It is in their best interest to preserve the environment and wildlife habitat for the success of their operation and that of the next generation of farmers and ranchers.

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 (MBTA) makes it illegal for anyone to "take...any migratory bird..." except under the terms of a valid permit issued pursuant to Federal regulations. Overall, this law provides significant benefits to conservation efforts and ecosystems nationwide. However, flexibility and ability to respond to changing conditions are essential to guarantee the law's long-term success.

The Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*) is one species protected under the MBTA that requires flexibility. Black Vultures live year-round in forested and open areas of the eastern and southern United States, but have expanded both in population and range in recent decades. This expansion can be problematic because Black Vultures are significantly more aggressive than the widely-recognized Turkey Vulture, a species known for their scavenging nature. Rather than adhering to a scavenger diet, Black Vultures are capable of capturing small animals, as well as killing and maiming livestock.

While Congress and agriculturists alike acknowledge the benefits of the MBTA, farmers and ranchers should not bear the burden when species protected under the MBTA thrive to the point that their overpopulation causes serious impacts to adjacent agricultural operations. In this case, ranchers are reporting countless instances of Black Vultures aggressively attacking newborn calves with fatal results.

Though farmers and ranchers are acutely aware of the harm caused by Black Vultures, their defenses are minimal and heavily regulated by the government. Currently, a \$100 depredation permit is available through the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) which allows producers to kill 30 birds annually. Farmers attest that, because vultures often attack newborn calves in large flocks, this limit is insufficient. Rather than continue this piecemeal approach to contain the damage caused by Black Vulture, Congress urges the Fish and Wildlife Service to take

action on behalf of American farmers and ranchers. Instead of continuing the restrictive practices currently in place, we encourage the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to take immediate action to control Black Vulture overpopulation and livestock predation issues through the issuance of a federal depredation order for Black Vultures. Black Vulture depredation is profoundly impacting the viability of many farm and ranch operations, so it's imperative to provide as much flexibility in the MBTA as is available under the law.

We appreciate your attention to this important issue. Thank you for your consideration of our request, and we look forward to your response.

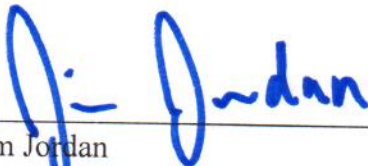
Sincerely,



Rick Crawford
Member of Congress



Bruce Westerman
Member of Congress



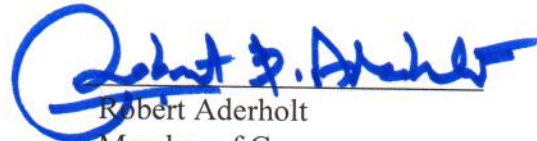
Jim Jordan
Member of Congress



Steve Womack
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Member of Congress



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Member of Congress



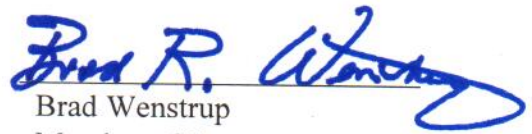
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Mark Meadows
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Frank Lucas
Member of Congress



Brad Wenstrup
Member of Congress



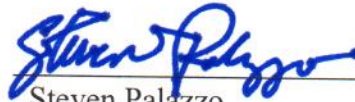
Steve Stivers
Member of Congress



Todd Rokita
Member of Congress



Ralph Abraham
Member of Congress



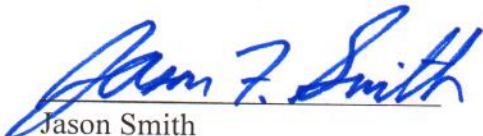
Steven Palazzo
Member of Congress



French Hill
Member of Congress



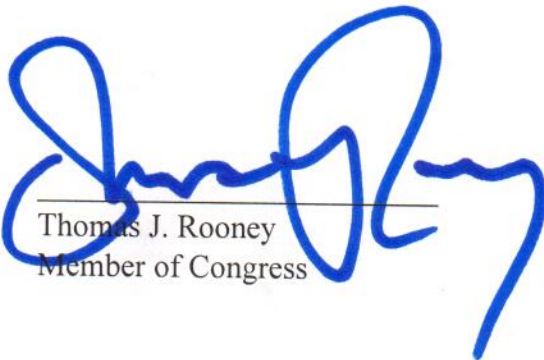
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Jason Smith
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James Comer
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